

HOW THE SAFETY OFFICER SAW STARS



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Suddenly, I heard, “Watch ou...!” I never heard the “t.” The next thing I remembered was seeing stars like in a Bugs Bunny cartoon. I felt like a freight train had run over my head.

What happened? A piece of metal shoring had fallen 20 feet and hit me in the head.

It was a beautiful brisk morning, with the ship pierside in Souda Bay, Crete—the perfect time to replace a damaged pipe on the side of the ship. The only way to do this job was to use a manlift or “cherry picker.” Although the one available wasn’t ideal (it had a rolling ramp and hydraulic platform on the end, instead of the usual basket), we decided we could use it.

Another problem was that the platform could not hold the weight of more than one person. The hydraulic solenoid bled off when more weight was added. Being accomplished innovators, we used two pieces of 10-foot, adjustable metal shoring to hold up the ramp and keep it from collapsing. We also tied safety lines from the end of the ramp to the ship’s catwalk to hold the ramp against the ship’s side while we worked. For extra safety, we blocked the manlift’s 5-inch metal wheels and applied the rusty brakes (which we would find didn’t work).

At last, we had the 400-pound ramp secured to our 17,000-ton slightly rolling ship. We—or, at least I, the ship’s safety officer—felt the ramp would roll with the ship, without posing a hazard. I changed my mind, though, while watching the repairs from the ground. The metal shoring we



Sailors work on a ship’s side from a basket on the end of a manlift. Unfortunately, the safety officer in this story had to make do with a manlift that had a rolling ramp and hydraulic platform on the end, instead of the usual basket.

had used to hold up the ramp worked loose and fell, hitting me in the noggin.

Three stitches and a bruised ego later, I had learned some valuable lessons. First, watch out for yourself, especially if you’re the ship’s safety officer, because you’re just as vulnerable to injury as anyone else. Second, if there’s a risk of something hitting you in the head, wear a hard hat. Third, resourcefulness is good, but only to a point: where it goes past common sense to common hazard. ☺